

On Tuesday, Robert Byrd, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, rolled out a long delayed earmark reform package. He did so as conservatives were becoming increasingly restless and poised to obstruct the upcoming spending bills. It was a shrewd political move by Byrd, who has long been known for his fondness of earmarks (Since 1991, he has directed over \$4.88 billion in earmarks to his state of West Virginia. Approximately, 5 highways, 2 scholarship programs, and 29 buildings are named after him). But, a review of the meat of Byrd's proposal shows he is not really serious about cleaning up the process. In fact, the new rules have so many loopholes and ways to get around them, it may not do much of anything.

For example, as part of the new rules, all earmarks that originate in committee must reveal the sponsor and recipient of the request. This sounds well and good -- after all it improves transparency and sunlight for committee proceedings. But, these rules do not apply to bills when they get to the floor of the Senate. As such, there is no recourse for senators if the Appropriations Committee doesn't live up to their word. If an earmark is added on the floor, Senators could not raise a point of order against any appropriations bill that does not meet the disclosure requirements.

What Chairman Byrd proposed will sound good on a 30 second sound bite on the nightly news, but it has little substance to it. Let's get serious.